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Illegal Prescription Drug Threat

Over the last two decades, the abuse of controlled prescription drugs (CPDs) has become an increasingly critical public health problem in the U.S.¹ During the 1970s and 1980s, the numbers of persons using CPDs for non-medical purposes (not prescribed or not as prescribed) remained relatively stable, but began to rise in the 1990s, most dramatically for opioid pain relievers and sedatives. By 2010, an estimated 20% of the US population aged 12 and older (52M persons) admitted to non-medical use of CPDs at some point in their lives, and 6% within the past year.² Admission rates for treatment for opiates other than heroin increased by over 300% between 1996 and 2006 and the number of visits to the emergency department for the misuse or abuse of pharmaceuticals increased by over 100% between 2004 and 2011.^{3,4}

Numbers of drug overdose deaths increased almost 300% between 1995 and 2012 and now exceed traffic accidents as the leading cause of death in the United States.⁵ Thirty-nine percent of those deaths in 2012 involved opioid analgesics.⁶ Since 2001, deaths from prescription opioids have been twice as frequent as deaths from heroin and cocaine overdoses combined.⁷ These trends paralleled the rapid growth in physicians' prescribing federally scheduled CPDs. Between 1997 and 2006, the volume of oxycodone dispensed by retail pharmacies increased 678%, hydrocodone (e.g., Vicodin) by 225%, and amphetamines

¹ Paulozzi, L. J., Budnitz, D. S., & Xi, Y. (2006). Increasing deaths from opioid analgesics in the United States. *Pharmacoepidemiology and Drug Safety*, 15(9), 618-627; Hall, A. J., Logan, J. E., Toblin, R. L., Kaplan, J. A., Kraner, J. C., Bixler, D., Paulozzi, L. J. (2008). Patterns of abuse among unintentional pharmaceutical overdose fatalities. *JAMA*, 300(22), 2613-2620; Paulozzi L.J., Jones C.M., Mack K.A., & RA, R. (2011). Vital signs: overdoses of prescription opioid pain relievers---United States, 1999--2008. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 60(43), 1487; Paulozzi, L. J., Weisler, R. H., & Patkar, A. A. (2011). A national epidemic of unintentional prescription opioid overdose deaths: how physicians can help control it. *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, 72(5), 589-592.

² Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2011). Results from the 2010 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: Summary of National Findings. (NSDUH Series H-41, HHS Publication No. (SMA) 11-4658. Rockville, MD.

³ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (2008). Office of Applied Studies. Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS): 1996-2006. National Admissions to Substance Abuse Treatment Services, DASIS Series: S-43, DHHS Publication No. (SMA) 08-4347, Rockville, MD.

⁴ Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Behavioral Health Statistics and Quality. (2012) The DAWN Report: Highlights of the 2011 Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN) Findings on Drug-Related Emergency Department Visits. Rockville, MD.

⁵ Fingerhut, L.A., & Cox C.S. (1988). Poisoning Mortality 1985-1995. *Public Health Rep.* May-Jun 1998;113(3):218-233; Warner, M., Hedegaard, H., & Chen, L. (2014). Trends in Drug-Poisoning Deaths Involving Opioid Analgesics and Heroin: United States, 1999–2012. Hyattsville, MD: *National Center for Health Statistics*.

⁶ Warner, M., Hedegaard, H., & Chen, L. (2014). Trends in Drug-poisoning Deaths Involving Opioid Analgesics and Heroin: United States, 1999–2012. Hyattsville, MD: *National Center for Health Statistics*.

⁷ Warner, M., Chen L., & Makuc, D.M. (2009). Increase in fatal poisonings involving opioid analgesics in the United States, 1999-2006. *National Center for Health Statistics Data Brief*. Sep 2009(22):1-8.

